



Matt Kean

Minister for Innovation and Better Regulation

David Elliott

Minister for Counter Terrorism, Minister for Corrections, and Minister for Veterans Affairs

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, February 12 2018

BERGIN REPORT INTO RSL FUNDRAISING

The NSW Government has today released the report of former NSW Supreme Court Judge Patricia Bergin into the fundraising activities of RSL NSW, RSL Welfare and Benevolent Institution and RSL LifeCare.

Minister for Better Regulation Matt Kean said Justice Bergin found the “old guard” of the NSW RSL had taken the organisation to the “brink of destruction” and had engaged in a “cover up” of the real reasons for the departure of disgraced former state president Don Rowe.

The inquiry found Rowe spent \$465,376 on his RSL credit card between 2009 and 2014, and allowed his son to stay, rent-free, in RSL-owned accommodation in the Sydney CBD for seven years.

“In her report, Justice Bergin wonders how Rowe could have misused the RSL’s funds then resign with ‘accolades and well-wishes that ignored the reality and misled the members and the public’,” Mr Kean said.

The report notes: ‘... the reality is that the culture was so ingrained that it has taken the scorching events of the last 12 months, including this inquiry, to shift its crust to make way for the refreshment and building of the organisation.’

“There’s no doubt the RSL has been through a devastating experience as the astonishing level of rorting, cover-ups and cronyism was exposed for all to see,” Mr Kean said.

“However, with James Brown and Andrew Condon now stepping up to the plate to take the RSL into a new era, I’m confident that trust can be restored.”

As recommended by Justice Bergin, the activities of Rowe have been referred to police.

In addition, Mr Kean said that the NSW Government:

- is referring the activities of 13 current and former NSW RSL State Councillors to ASIC and the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) in relation to the cover up of Rowe’s misconduct;
- is referring the activities of eight former and current RSL LifeCare office-holders to ASIC and the ACNC in relation to their conduct as directors;

- had amended the conditions on RSL NSW's fundraising authority to stop it fundraising until its auditor EY has certified that RSL NSW has the processes to comply with the law;
- will publish updated guidelines for charities about how they can comply with NSW fundraising laws;
- will review Fair Trading's approach to enforcing fundraising laws; and,
- will consider Justice Bergin's other recommendations.

Minister for Veterans Affairs David Elliott said the recommendations of the inquiry provide the veterans community with the closure they deserve.

"The RSL can now move forward with its core responsibilities of supporting veterans and their community," Mr Elliott said.

"Our veterans have so much to look forward to during the Centenary of the Armistice including the Veterans Employment Program, Invictus Games, initiatives to address homelessness, and a number of war memorial grant programs."